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 SUBJECT: TALKING POINTS ON IRAQ GOVERNMENT FORMATION

Classified By: Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg for reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Deputies approved on February 9, 2010 a strategy for U.S. actions during Iraq's government formation period. Following the March 7 elections, Iraq will begin what is expected to be an extended period of government formation negotiations. We request that Embassy Baghdad draw from the approved talking points below in engaging host government officials on government formation issues. Other posts are likewise encouraged to draw from the points as appropriate following the March 7 elections, or before then to respond to questions on U.S. views regarding government formation in Iraq.

 SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

12. (U) Overall Conduct during Election and Government Formation

- We are urging all Iraqi leaders and parties to do what they can to advance national unity.
- We urge all Iraqis leaders and parties to exercise restraint in action and rhetoric. Provocative steps or speech only create opportunities for extremists to exploit.
- We are asking all Iraqi leaders and parties to remain committed to peaceful resolution of outstanding disagreements.

13. (U) U.S. Policy on Caretaker Government

- We know that the enemies of Iraq will attempt to exploit the period between elections and the seating of the new government.
- During this time period, it is critical that the caretaker government continue providing security, funding flows, and essential services to the Iraqi people.
- Because of the inevitable uncertainty during this period, we urge you to make clear that it is necessary for government ministries to continue to carry out their day-to-day responsibilities.
- We have tremendous admiration for the progress achieved by Iraq's government over the past four years. We urge you to take steps to record current policies and programs and prepare to share this information with the next government.
- You can count on continued U.S. assistance through the programs and people we have in place in partnership with Iraqi government officials.

14. (U) U.S. Policy on Government Formation

- We congratulate the newly elected members of the Council of Representatives.
- We call on Iraq's leaders to form a government that is legitimate, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the Iraqi people.
- We urge Iraq's leaders to respect the constitutional guidelines and timelines for government formation. To prevent instability, it is important that the process of government formation proceed in a timely manner.
- The naming of a cabinet and the selection of other government officials are decisions for Iraqis. The United States is not backing specific candidates for particular posts.
- The United States seeks a long-term partnership with Iraq. We want to fully engage with the Iraqi government to implement the Strategic Framework Agreement and strengthen our bilateral partnership across many sectors.

15. (U) U.S. Policy on Unresolved Issues

- The United States remains committed to using our good offices to help Iraqis overcome outstanding disagreements between the government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government.
- We strongly support the establishment of mechanisms or processes to resolve these disagreements and encourage a continued UN role.
- We believe it is unlikely that longstanding disagreements can be resolved as part of the government formation process. Attempting to impose a solution will only delay government formation.

16. (U) If Asked: Who is the United States backing for positions in the new government? The naming of a cabinet and the selection of other government officials are decisions for Iraqis. The United States is not backing specific candidates for particular posts. Of course, to sustain and expand our bilateral relationship, we will welcome Iraqi partners who share this goal.

- What is the U.S. position on the future of the three-person Presidency Council? We believe the Presidency Council played an important role in maintaining checks and balances and preserving national unity. The future of the Presidency is an Iraqi decision, but we would encourage Iraqi leaders to ensure that there are robust mechanisms for checks and balances in the new Iraqi government.

POINT OF CONTACT

17. (SBU) Please contact Iraq Desk Officer Justin Reynolds at (202) 647-5281 or via e-mail at reynoldsje@state.gov or reynoldsje@state.sgov.gov with substantive feedback and for any further background information.

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